



Self Care for Massage Therapists: Preparing for the Game of Treatment

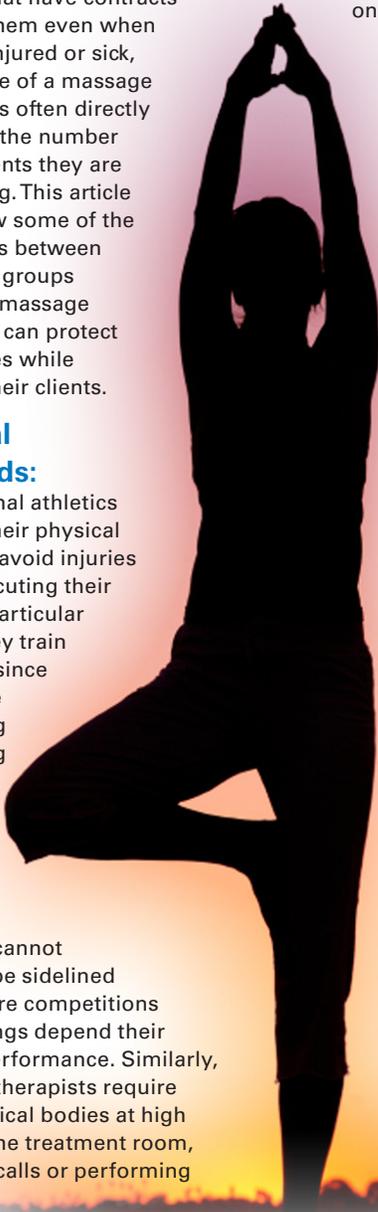
By David Kent, LMT, NCTMB

Keeping It Simple Series

While massage therapists are not professional athletes like Michael Phelps, Tiger Woods or the Williams sisters there are a few similarities we should examine and learn from. Professional athletes consistently perform certain actions that helped ensure their success. Massage Therapists can apply many of the same philosophies and actions to help their success. Unlike professional athletes that have contracts that pay them even when they are injured or sick, the income of a massage therapist is often directly related to the number of treatments they are performing. This article will review some of the similarities between these two groups and ways massage therapists can protect themselves while treating their clients.

Physical Demands:

Professional athletics prepare their physical bodies to avoid injuries while executing their skill in a particular sport. They train regularly since they make their living competing on the field, the court or in the pool and cannot afford to be sidelined since future competitions and rankings depend their current performance. Similarly, massage therapists require their physical bodies at high levels in the treatment room, doing outcalls or performing



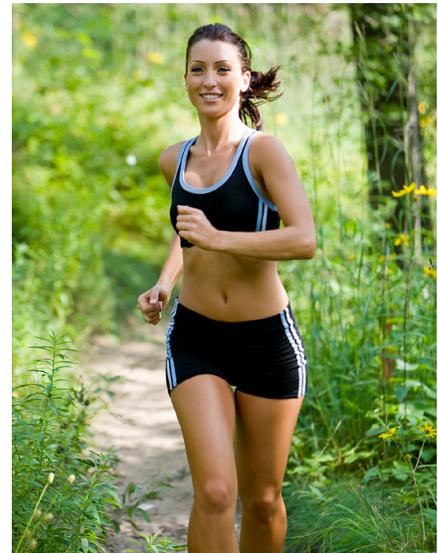
chair massage. Therapists are also being "ranked" by their clients on whether to reschedule, the amount of the tip, or to refer family, friends and co-workers.

Many sporting events place physical demands on the players for 30 to 90 minutes a game. Likewise, the length of a typical massage therapy session is 30-90 minutes. The physical demands on the therapist can be enormous depending on the client's size, techniques being integrated, room temperature, flooring type, table height, and other factors.

Self-Care:

Michael Phelps competed in 17 races during the 2008 Olympics winning 8 gold medals, injury free. Do you think he integrated self-care techniques like: stretching, resting, eating nutritious foods, working-out and massage therapy? Many massage therapists perform seventeen plus treatments every few days with little to no self-care. Massage therapists must train and maintain their bodies to avoid injuries and be prepared for the physical demands needed in the treatment room. Care for your body by:

- Sleeping enough so your mind and body are well rested.
- Stretch daily to maintain flexibility, good posture and avoid injuries.
- Workout regularly to have the strength and endurance to perform therapy. Yoga is a great workout that includes flexibility.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat nutritious foods.
- Receive massage regularly



Protect your Body:

Athletes wear special equipment to protect their bodies like: helmets, padding, eye goggles, gloves or support braces on their knees, ankle and elbows. The equipment gives them an edge and allows them to work smarter not harder while avoiding injury. Here are a few tips for protecting your body:

- Wear the proper shoes to avoid pain in the feet, knees, back and neck. Would you expect a pro sports athlete to wear dress shoes for competition?
- Adjust your table height for the size of the client and techniques being integrated. You are setting yourself up for injury if your table is not set ergonomically correct for the job being performed. It will be impossible to use proper body mechanics, if your table height is too high or too low.
- Use proper body mechanic. This is the easiest way to avoid injury and conserve your energy.
- Sit in a chair or ball when working on a client's neck or feet, to give your body a break.
- Use pressure bars, rollers and other devices once you are trained and proficient in their safe use.





Collecting the Data and Facts:

Competitive athletes collect any data possible by reading articles or reviewing video clips of prior competitions to identify patterns and design counterstrategies. Here are a few ways to learn more about your clients, their conditions and how to design customized treatment plans:

- Gather information by having the client complete intake forms. This process also helps the client get clear on the chronological order that this condition has progressed and recall the types of treatments and their effectiveness to date. Then you can ask for clarification of what they have written
- Identify patterns by taking postural analysis photos. Many cell photos have cameras built in to them, making it easy to take postural analysis photos. Review Trigger Point or other charts that determine the possible origins of their condition.
- Design a customized treatment plan to address their condition with in information gathered from the intake forms, postural analysis photos, range-of-motion, discussion with the client, trigger

point findings, etc.

- Educate your client during and after the session. Again, postural analysis photos show how their poor posture is causing stress on various muscles, joints and ligaments of their body. You can also use the photos to show postural improvements over time. I also use a wet erase marker to circle all of their Trigger Point patterns on the charts so they better understand what I am doing and the goals we are trying to achieve.

The Fundamentals:

The top athletes in any field will tell you they consistently practice and apply the basic fundamentals of their craft. They also have a coach on staff to ensure they are applying the fundamentals. You can easily have a coach with you everyday by integrating the following:

- Watching DVD programs over and over will help reinforce the information and is similar to being in a seminar.
- Review manuals and handouts adding special notes. Some programs have manuals that correspond to the DVD programs and cross-reference other

products like charts of that same system. This helps you “connect the dots” and integrate the information.

- Receive massage regularly from different therapists. This helps you re-evaluate your approach and “tableside” manner.
- Read articles in trade journals and online.
- Take seminars to improve your skills.
- Stay connected and interact with your peers.

The bottom line is massage therapists can protect their bodies and income by applying the same fundamentals as professional athletes. The key is making certain actions priorities in your life and consistently following through. I encourage you to read all the articles in my “Keeping It Simple” series and hang this article in a place that allows you to review it often as a “coach” to help keep you on target.

David Kent, LMT, NCTMB, is an international presenter, product innovator and writer. His clinic, Muscular Pain Relief Center, is in Deltona, Florida, where he receives referrals from various healthcare providers. David is President and Founder of Kent Health Systems which teaches Human Dissection, Deep Tissue Medical Massage and Practice Building seminars, and has developed a line of products, including the Postural Analysis Grid Chart™, Trigger Point Charts, Personalized Essential Office Forms™, and DVD programs. Visit www.KentHealth.com or call (888) 574-5600 for more information.



Kent Health
— S Y S T E M S —

KentHealth.com | 888.574.5600